

## THE QUESTION OF RACE TRADITION

Society For Historical Research Hears Subject Discussed.

LEARNED OPINION BY LOCKE.

Rhodes Scholarship Student in Philosophy Address Says the Desire to Preserve the Past Connects Us to a Racial Consciousness—Race Stands Between Two Heritages.

Yonkers, N. Y.—The year end meeting of the Negro Research society held recently at the residence of the president, Mr. John Edward Bruce, in this city, was made notable by the presence of Alain Le Roy Locke, who is a graduate of Oxford university. He bears the distinction of being the only member of the race to win one of the Rhodes scholarships. Mr. Locke was the principal speaker on this occasion, and a reception was given in his honor by the society in view of the fact that he is to return to Berlin in January to complete his studies.

Mr. Locke's subject was "The Negro and a Race Tradition." He spoke in part as follows:

A historical society stands primarily at the expression of a practical duty toward a corporate past, and a Negro historical society stands therefore for an avowed duty toward a racial past. The Negro has special duties and specific problems with regard to his past; but, however specific and special these duties and problems are, the duties and problems of any people in their acquisition of historical mindedness in the establishment of a tradition. Although the American Negro faces what all thoughtful observers must admit to be a historical dilemma, he can avoid it if he wishes. He has only to forget or repudiate his past or as much of it as he deems wise and consistent to forget and repudiate.

As an American, indeed, he can claim the high but dangerous privilege of tak-



ALAIN LE ROY LOCKE.

ing large liberties with his past both in the direction of adoption and that of repudiation. As an American he can exercise the rights of a mental republican. He can begin anywhere and claim anything. The question is therefore whether or not the Negro wishes to have a separate history, apart from the general history of this country, or what justification there is other than the purely sentimental reasons he sometimes gives himself and the wholly unjustifiable reasons usually given him for having a separate tradition in contrast or addition to the tradition he can acquire and claim as an American, enjoying theoretically at least all of the benefits of free education and democratic institutions.

For very different reasons and very diverse hopes than the speaker found himself forced to believe in a race history and a race culture. The desire to preserve our past commits us to a racial consciousness and requires of us the development of a sense for corporate interests and destinies. Indeed the tendencies and facts which threaten the solidarity and perpetuity of a distinct Negro tradition in this country may prove the ultimate stumbling blocks in the way of our progress. The historical dilemma of the American Negro is the painful position of standing between two heritages, one lost, the other not fully acquired; the one something for which we have as yet no definite use and the other something which may not have permanent satisfaction for us.

This situation is both the price and the reward of the Negro's unique history. Later he may be as anxious to take the advantages of the alternatives as he is at present to escape the disadvantages of this situation. Our intellectual and spiritual problems have a different point of origin from social or political or economic issues we face, and they are as likely to have a different solution. History and culture, at all events, are known only as the attributes of nations and races. One cannot raise the question of history without raising the question of race or nationality.

Any one who surveys at all closely the estate of culture or the field of history will find that it has its fences and proprietary rights, quite as material in their way as the fences and property deeds of any civilized community. They will see that no people has acquired a passport to culture, citizenship and the exchange civilities of civilization until it has cultivated its own land, a own tradition and evolved its own culture. A people that proceeds upon any other assumption is threatened under the present facts at least with the fate of mental pariahs. Race is not only the key to history, as Disraeli said; it is the most legitimate and indisputable claim to education and culture.

We as Negroes need to distinguish sharply between the claim of education and the claim of a mental birthright. It may even be that we shall have to choose between them on certain occasions. Certainly we must always bear the distinction in mind. The very accidents of our birth and history make for us a claim upon a civilization and a heritage of ideas which no amount of mental jugglery and self sought mystification can conceal from us as not ours in the same literal sense that it is the hereditary culture and history of Aryan peoples. This is the crux of the problem from the side of education and

culture. Sooner or later if he persists in ignoring this distinction the Afro-American of culture finds he is an anomaly; finds that he is sharing and participating in a culture that is his only by right of acquisition and not by right of inheritance.

To be mindful of the distinction does not necessarily make the civilization and culture we propose to claim and share any the less ours, but it does make it ours in a different way. This is the contention with the proper approach and reservation the frank admission that we participate in an alien culture justifies us in a certain historic and actual pride of acquisition in having made our own what was in the beginning not ours. Further, such an admission should enable us by way of contrast to realize rationally our own position, our own derivations and allegiances, and to help us to build up in addition a tradition worthy of our united loyalties.

Instead, therefore, of belittling us the great contrast of Aryan culture should make it more meaningful to be a Negro. The Negro's attitude toward his past has hitherto been a sentimental and mistaken one. There are grave dangers and difficulties in achieving a new attitude, but a time must be achieved. We might in time succeed in getting the first slave ship into a historical perspective, which would make it a spiritual Mayflower of freedom from the handicaps of a tropical climate, but better than this would be the attitude which would insist upon the full and remotest tradition of the race. As a patriot the American is satisfied to go back as far as the Mayflower, but as a scholar he is forced to go back a little farther. We have then the phenomenon of Anglo-Saxon tradition, Anglo-Saxon civilization, Aryan culture! It should be—indeed it must be—the same with us. The American Negro must in time change his attitude toward the past. The stamp of the abolitionist experience and appeal is still upon us. It deserves to be an indelible memory. But the sentimental ties which bind us to the abolitionist period of our history must not be allowed to control our historical attitudes. A generation that has not lived through such a time can never be expected to care for race history in exactly the same way. Already the younger generation is lapsing from that sentimental attitude and it is well, since the attitude which freed us physically will never free us mentally. It binds us fast to what is, after all, only one period in the race life. It keeps us from the more objective, the scholarly, attitude toward history. It causes us to remain in the narrow circle of early American history, the hopelessly Quixotic whim of a people that wishes to begin history all over again. We cannot afford to let our regard for our immediate past blind us to the remote racial past, a past which stands in need of patient and painstaking scholarship to recover, but even more perhaps in need of a worthier historical attitude to accept it.

American tradition and scholarship are in process of becoming out in the name of culture, and for the sake of tradition a period of reconstructive scholarship is beginning, a period that will retrieve the necessary damage of the democratic secession. This is being done that the American of culture need not have to pay the high price of expatriation for his culture. Our situation is parallel. Our involuntary transportation is analogous to the colonial Americans' voluntary revolution. We must, like him, go back to claim as tradition and culture all we have broken with as government and authority. There is for us no alternative to turning back toward an African and racial past. But such a course need no more interfere with our entering into the full heritage of a liberal education than race loyalty to Anglo-Saxon civilization interferes with American patriotism.

America, standing, as it does, for the common ownership of the utilities of civilization, cannot stand for the amalgamation of cultures. America, at all events, is not sure of her own mental nationality, and behind the traditional uniformities of American life and thought it is significant to find certain latent racial traits and traditions in process of development and assertion. The fear that the acknowledgment of the birth claim to ideas undermines the republican claims to free institutions, the fear that a sense for race history and tradition shuts one out from an impersonal and more inclusive participation in general history and culture, can only be indulged by those who misunderstand the trend of American institutions. Indeed, freed from national responsibilities and governmental ambitions, racial pretensions are free in this country to develop without opposition or misconception. Certainly America has offered this to other races. Not only have certain Irish ambitions and hopes impossible of realization elsewhere been realized in this country, but their realization, while contributory largely and patriotically to the sum total of American achievement, has reacted upon the whole status and welfare of that race in its native home. The Jewish communism in this country further has contributed to its racial life the world over and stands today as the champion of some of its most significant reform movements. America affords the unique opportunity of a race life and propaganda existing without contradicting national and patriotic loyalties and responsibilities.

The historical dilemma of the American Negro is a great culture problem. It is also a great American problem. Its solution will prove or disprove whether or not culture by adoption is possible and whether a race can exist within a nation without disrupting the nation or contradicting itself. If we accept the burden of being an experiment in this land of experiment it is because we have additional reasons. These additional reasons are the desire to solve our own problems, to convert invidious distinctions into others rational and respected.

Good Work of Women's Clubs in Texas. The Mothers' club of San Antonio, Tex., conducts a kindergarten in connection with its regular work. The Charity club in Houston is interested in the Working Girls' home, and the Nurses' club in the same town sustains a nursery for the care of children whose mothers have to work out by the day. These organizations have come about largely through the influence of the State Federation of Women's Clubs.

Glencoe Club's Most Speedy Runner. Thomas Harris of the Glencoe Athletic club in New York has again demonstrated his ability as the most speedy runner of the group. In the recent three and a half mile contest he covered the distance in 21 minutes 30 seconds. In the last half of the course he took his own time and came up to the finish in a walk, winning easily over Mazzucca, his club mate, who opposed him, by 500 yards.

Young Selected For Liberian Post. Captain Charles Young of the Ninth United States cavalry, who has been stationed at Fort D. A. Russell, according to a current report has recently been selected by the war department for special duty in Liberia, for which post he will probably sail about the middle of January.



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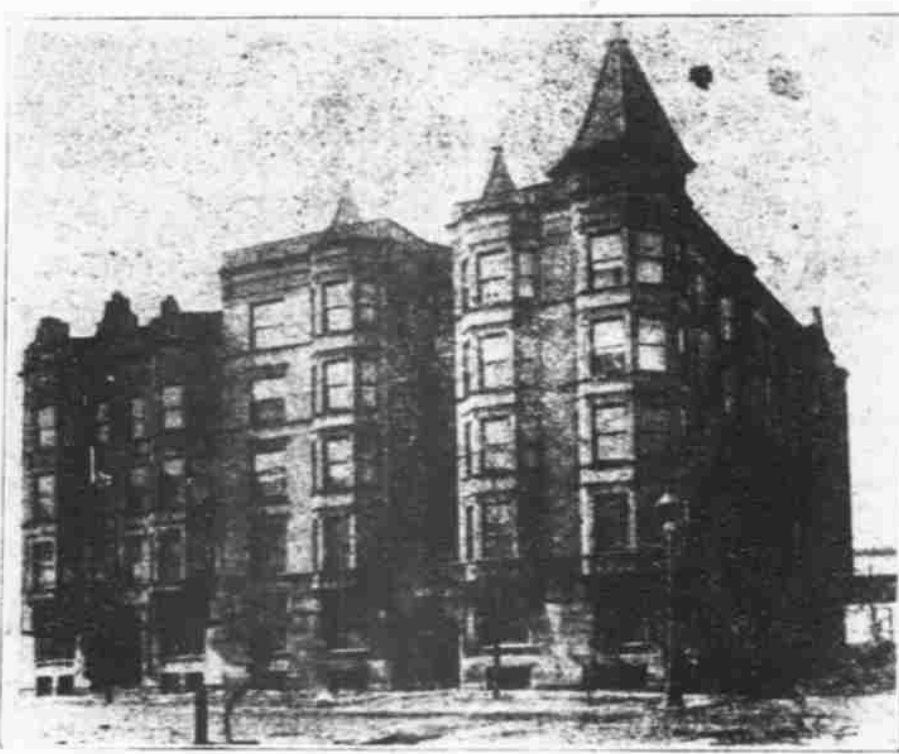
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### SIRE AND SONS.

Herbert Knox Smith, commissioner of corporations in Washington, has purchased Red Top, the former home of President Grover Cleveland.

Speaker Clark made his first fee when a young man by writing an oration for a college student who had been elected class orator and wanted to get off something particularly fine.

Fernando Pico, son of the last Mexican governor of California, lives with his wife in an old stable on a ranch in the Santa Monica mountains. He is caretaker of the place. Pico is sixty-seven years of age.

William Wallace Gilchrist, for thirty-six consecutive years conductor of the Mendelssohn club, Philadelphia, and now in his thirty-seventh year in that capacity, holds the record for such service in this country.

M. Peru, the last surviving pupil of Chopin, recently gave his farewell concert in Paris. He is over eighty years of age, but remarkably vigorous, and plays with all the delicacy which tradition associates with the art of the great Polish pianist.

Senator Francis E. Warren of Wyoming, now chairman of the senate committee on military affairs, was an

officer in the war between Mexico and received the congressional medal of honor for gallantry in the field at the siege of Fort Hudson.

### Current Comment.

Almost any seer will prophesy off-hand that 1912 is going to be a year of unrest for schedule K.—Denver Republican.

The man who invented international peace—if there is such a man—has not yet got his invention in successful working order.—Philadelphia Press.

China is "fighting for freedom and good government." When she acquires the latter we of the occident would mightily like to know how she did it.—Boston Transcript.

Dr. Cook declared in Pittsburgh that he had lecture dates booked for two years ahead. Barnum's immortal saying finds fresh corroboration daily.—Pittsburgh Gazette-Times.

There are forty memorials to Robert Burns, of which twenty-seven are statues. During the last decade statues to the poet have been erected at Toronto, Melbourne, Denver, Sydney, N. S. W.; Chicago, Frederickton, N. B.; San Francisco and Milwaukee.

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